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SUBJECT: PROMOTING FOOD SECURITY (GHFSI) IN LIBERIA

REF: A) STATE 127466, B) STATE 124059, C) STATE 132094

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In Liberia, food insecurity presents daily hardships for the majority of citizens, and has been an historic cause of destabilizing political unrest. Post recognizes that a reinvigorated agricultural sector is the key to broad-based employment, economic growth, and a healthy population, while stimulating demand for rural infrastructure rehabilitation and attracting foreign investment. To that end, post has devised an interagency food security strategy to amplify USAID's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative (GHFSI). A mission-wide GHFSI development group will meet monthly to explore how existing human resources and programs can be marshaled in support of Liberia's food security efforts. A communications strategy will explain agriculture's potential value to Liberia, highlight USG efforts, and engage the general public, other development partners and the GOL in sharing information and building a consensus that leads to improved food security. Post will leverage existing public diplomacy resources and small grants, such as exchange programs and the Ambassador's Self-Help Fund. Post also will help Peace Corps, which enjoys a broad reach in rural areas, and AFRICOM, which oversees a large program to rebuild Liberia's army, to enhance existing projects that peripherally support food security. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Liberia is one of the most food insecure countries in Africa; a tragic irony considering the abundant sources of water and lush vegetation. Fourteen years of civil conflict decimated a once self-sufficient agricultural industry. Rice constitutes the staple of the Liberian diet, yet domestic producers satisfy only 40% of total demand. Liberia's reliance upon imported food stuffs exposes it to fluctuations in global commodity prices, which in turn erodes purchasing power - a catastrophe in a country where 80% of people eke out a living on less than one dollar per day. An inefficient port in Monrovia further raises the price of food imports, and dilapidated rural infrastructure makes it costly and time-consuming to connect producers and consumers. Finally, shallow financial markets preclude would-be entrepreneurs from investing in agriculture-related industries. As a result, a 2006 Food and Agriculture Organization study concluded that only nine percent of rural households in Liberia were food secure.

¶3. (U) In concert with GOL priorities, USAID has designed a GHFSI implementation plan that increases sustainable market-led growth across the entire food production and market chain (including investment in agricultural research to improve crop yields, construction of farm-to-market roads, and access to finance), prevents and treats under-nutrition, and reduces trade and transportation barriers. The Food and Enterprise Development Program, which begins in May, will provide \$110 million over three years to support GHFSI goals. In addition, Post advances the food security agenda through the following mechanisms: USAID's Office of Food for Peace (\$15 million per year), the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food for Progress (\$3 million), the Sustainable Tree Crop Program (\$10 million), technical assistance to support the Ministry of

Agriculture (\$4 million), the Land Reform and Community Forestry Program (\$6 million over 2.5 years), and the Liberia Energy Sector Support Program (\$20 million).

Interagency GHFSI Development Group

14. (U) To ensure coordination of diplomatic and development efforts, post has created the GHFSI Development Group. The DCM will chair a monthly meeting, which will include representatives from the political/economic and public affairs sections, USAID's Economic Growth team, the Peace Corps, and the Office of Security Cooperation (AFRICOM). USAID subject matter experts in health, education and democracy and governance will participate as needed. Economic Officer Sarah Gonzales has been designated Embassy point of contact for interagency food security coordination and will propose the agenda for meetings.

15. (U) While food security is a long-standing priority for the Mission, regular coordination will ensure more creative and effective use of existing resources. The GHFSI Development Group will explore how existing State, Peace Corps and military programs and skill sets can be used to amplify the GHFSI's development goals. The group will design strategies for media and commercial outreach, ensure public diplomacy programs support food security goals, and coordinate among US agencies serving in Liberia.

Communicating the Value of Domestic Agriculture

16. (U) During the civil war, Liberians fled to the relative safety of urban areas, where agricultural skills enervated and an entire

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generation became accustomed to city life and imported food. Now, despite limited urban employment opportunities, many Liberians languish in Monrovia, and GOL and donor incentives to return to agrarian life have failed to persuade a cynical urban populace that agriculture can once again be profitable.

17. (U) To combat misapprehensions that undermine agricultural revitalization, designing a communications strategy is the Development Group's first priority. In fact, the committee agrees that a comprehensive media and public outreach campaign is perhaps the best means by which existing diplomatic resources can be deployed to buttress the GHFSI development agenda, which is itself a reflection of the GOL's Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) and the Liberia Agriculture Investment Support Program (LASIP).

18. (U) There are several messages post hopes to communicate. First, we must reinforce the value of agriculture to a developing economy. With appeals to both patriotism and economic self-interest, we must outline how agricultural development can lead to widespread employment opportunities, better infrastructure and improved nutrition. Second, to overcome the defeatist conviction that roads are too derelict and agricultural skills too long forgotten, we must draw media and public attention to every infrastructure project, technical assistance program or microcredit scheme, and explain plainly and carefully how each project draws Liberia one step closer to agricultural self-sufficiency. We will also highlight "success stories," particularly those that reveal Liberians who have overcome obstacles to profit from agricultural endeavors. Third, we must attempt to influence urban citizens' preference for imported rice through a "made in Liberia" campaign. To strengthen consumer demand, media outreach will tout the economic benefits of import substitution and the superior nutritional content of domestic rice.

19. (U) Post will reinforce these messages through the Ambassador's speeches, editorials in local newspapers, and ribbon-cutting events. The Development Group will create a food security fact sheet that outlines Embassy-wide diplomatic and development efforts and provides talking points on the value of agricultural revitalization for Liberia's economic growth and political stability. Mission personnel will be encouraged to use these talking points in

conversations with varied public and private sector contacts. In addition, post will introduce food security themes into existing public diplomacy programs, such as speakers' programs at American Corners, the International Visitors' Leadership Program and the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program.

¶10. (U) As an opening salvo, the Ambassador will introduce these themes during an upcoming event to inaugurate a USAID-funded, United Nations-World Food Program school feeding program. Thanks to an unexpected bumper rice crop this year, USAID, through WFP, will purchase rice from Liberian farmers and distribute it to schools throughout the country. This \$3.5 million project is made possible due to the FY09 (carryover) supplemental issued by Congress for Global Financial Crisis mitigation. The ribbon-cutting, to be held in late January or early February, offers an opportunity to communicate multiple messages we wish to share with the Liberian public: donors' coordinated support for GOL agriculture initiatives, the potential for domestic rice production, and the link between proper nutrition and children's physical and intellectual development.

Youth Outreach

¶11. (U) Despite Liberia's agrarian roots, few school children or teenagers entering the work force have experience with agriculture or livestock cultivation, and fewer still perceive farming as a viable profession. Through the 1980s, all public schools required students to take a vocational class in farming. Students spent one afternoon per week cultivating a school-owned vegetable garden, learning the basic principles of agriculture and sharing equally the produce they cultivated. Few schools still offer this practical curriculum, although post proposes other small-scale mechanisms on this model that would reintroduce youth to farming.

¶12. (U) Liberia's 24 Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) work primarily in the education sector, whether as teachers at the Rural Teacher Training Institutes (RTTI), advocates of Parent Teacher Associations in local schools, or trainers of public health professionals. PTA organizers assist PTAs in creating vegetable gardens at the local schools to enhance school lunch programs and ensure the effective delivery of food to children. Nutrition instructors teach health care professionals the importance and intricacies of nutrition. Teacher-trainers support the efforts of the RTTIs to grow their own food, and plan to incorporate agriculture into the teacher training curriculum, with the hope that teachers will impart useful knowledge

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to students once they return to classrooms throughout the country.

¶13. (U) Post will also explore the possibility of reviving 4-H in Liberia. The Ministry of Youth and Sports, which has a modest national volunteer service program, may be a viable partner in this effort, and we will encourage them to pursue 4-H's youth exchange program. Finally, the Public Affairs Section will use its educational advisory services to encourage more young people to pursue careers in sustainable agriculture.

Ambassador's Self-Help Fund and Other Small Grants

¶14. (U) Of 13 self-help projects in 2010, seven are related to agriculture or food security. Post will launch an "adopt a self-help project," to ensure that each funded organization or community is paired with an officer who provides guidance and oversight during the year-long project, and assures continued sustainability and success in 2011 and beyond. For example, one project supports 50 women who are starting a poultry farm. The officer who supports this project might help the women identify appropriate markets to sell their goods, design a cost-effective mechanism for getting goods to market, and help them time the chickens' lifecycle to coincide with seasonal demand.

¶15. (U) Where Embassy human resources alone are insufficient, other small grant programs may enable Post to support grassroots organizations that would complement USAID's endeavors. For example, Post's food security Development Committee will develop a grant request to the Office of Global Women's Issues in response to its

request for proposals (ref C). We plan to identify a worthy local organization that could use funds to encourage women's economic empowerment through agriculture.

Military Outreach

¶16. (U) Both AFRICOM and the United National Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) recognize that food security programs for soldiers and ex-combatants advance military reform, improve soldiers' morale and reinforce peacekeeping efforts. For example, at Camp Ware near Monrovia, U.S. military and contractors, who serve as mentors to military personnel, are helping the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) clear land and plant crops. USAID will provide technical training, seeds and tools beginning January 18, and if the project is successful, the Office of Security Cooperation may provide similar resources to other AFL military bases.

¶17. (U) UNMIL's Bangladesh unit trains ex-combatants as farmers in Bong County, and the new farmers run a small farm that grows enough rice and vegetables for their families. However, the Bangladeshi battalion does not retain any trained farmers or agronomists, so their efforts, while providing a valued community service, remain modest. The new U.S. military observer at UNMIL will work with the UN to scale and professionalize this operation, so that it can be adopted successfully as a viable profession for ex-combatants in other counties.

THOMAS-GREENFIELD